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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0035  
INFO RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE  
RUEHWH/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS

UNCLAS CARACAS 002125

SIPDIS

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HQSOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD  
DEPT PASS TO AID/OTI RPORTER

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [VE](#) [CO](#)  
SUBJECT: VENEZUELA - COLOMBIA BRIDGE BLOCKADE LIFTED

REF: A. CARACAS 01680

[1](#)B. BOGOTA 07225

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary. Truckers ended a 97-day binational blockade of bridges joining Venezuela and Colombia on October 13 after the Colombian government agreed to relocate toll booths, giving motorists alternate local routes to avoid the Colombian tolls. Truck drivers from both countries were protesting the Colombian levy with a series of blockades since July 2. The blockades cost the local Venezuelan economy an estimated USD 5-6 million per day in lost revenue and required the personal efforts of the Colombian Foreign Minister to end the blockade. End Summary.

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Bridge Impasse Ends  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) Venezuelan and Colombian truckers started this bilateral disagreement by blockading border crossings in Tachira because of Colombia's decision to charge tolls at border crossings between Tachira State and the Colombian city of Cucuta. The 97-day spat eventually closed several international bridges that connect Tachira State to Colombia's Norte de Santander Department. Losses to trade as a result of the protests and border closures--through which 70 to 80 percent of Venezuelan-Colombian trade is conducted--were estimated as high as 5-6 million a day. An IVP alumn in Tachira told Poloff that the closures had damaged the economies of the Venezuelan towns of Bolivar and Pedro Maria Urena, but both are now recovering.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Venezuelan government officials supported the demand that Colombia withdraw the tolls. Foreign Minister Maduro urged Colombia on August 10 to eliminate the toll charges and asked that it behave in the same "neighborly spirit" as Venezuela. Vice Foreign Minister Pavel Rondon acted as an intermediary between the protesters and the Colombian government. Colombian Foreign Minister Fernando Araujo announced October 12 the relocation of toll booths four kilometers further down the road in Colombia, allowing motorists a local traffic route to avoid the tolls.  
DUDDY